

No. 47  
70

## TO THE HONOURABLE HOUSE OF Commons assembled in Parliament.

*An Abstract of the generall grievances of the poore Free-men and Journey-men Printers oppressed, and kept in servile bondage all their lives by the unlawfull ordinances of the Master and Wardens of the Company, which they fortifie only by a Warrant dormant.*

*With their most Humble Petition,*

**F**ROM the beginning of Printing his Maesties progenitors by their prerogative Royall did priuiledge such persons as they pleased sely to Print some peculiar bookes, leauing the rest in generall to the Printers.

And for this Art of Printing was the key that opened the doore of knowledge and learning (which is the honour and support of all States and Kingdomes) his Maesties progenitors were pleased to incorporate a selected number, and to indow them with a large Charter and many great priuiledges which was graciously intended for the generall good of the whole company, but by the innovations brought in by the Masters and their ordinances, the benefit is conuerted to them in particular, and the petitioners vtterly ruined thereby.

The lawes of the kingdome authorise all persons, that haue serued an Apprentiship according to the statute, lawfully to set vp and vse that trade to which they haue serued. But the petitioners are deprived of that benefit (which all honest and loyall subiects inioy) by ordinances of the Masters of their company. And made perpetuall bondmen to serue some few of the rich all their liues vpon such condicions, and for such hire, and at such times, as the Masters thinke fit: for their trade of Printing (but as seruants) they must not vse, so as they take all possibiltie of Aduancement (be they neuer so exquisite in their qualitie) from the petitioners, and make them vncapable of maintenance for them their wiues and posterities.

The Masters obtained a decree 28. Eliz. prohibiting the petitioners to set vp any presse or presses wherewith to print vpon paine of fixe moneths imprisonment without Bayle or mainprise, and his presses and other instruments to be defaced.

The decree was obtained vnder colour of granting the petitioners diuers bookes in priuiledge to bee printed for their benefit, and diuers ordinances for the petitioners continuall and full employments, and other orders profitable for them. But the decree obtained, they obserued none of their contracts: those being instituted without penalty. But all that tended to the petitioners preiudice, and their Masters particular profits, were inioyned vnder great and grieuous punishments.

Whereas his Maestie was graciously pleased to grant in priuiledge the printing of diuers bookes vnto the petitioners the poore Printers (they by their ordinances haue disposed them wholly to their owne particular benefit, the petitioners hauing no share or benefit of his Maesties most gracious and free bountie, intended chiefly to the poore petitioners. And with the profit of his Maesties gift, they haue purchased and drawne into their hands diuers other priuiledged bookes, conuerting them likewise to their owne ends.

In like manner vnder a false pretence of relieuing the poore, they haue obtained almost all into their hands, what either his Maestie: or his progenitors euer granted in priuiledge, of which the Petitioners and poore sort of Printers expect benefit, reape indemnity and preiudice, and his Maesties Subiects in general are abused by their exactions.

For they keeping multiplicity of Apprentices, (who after their Apprentiships, like the Petitioners, become for euer more seruile then before) Print Bookes most by their Apprentices, whereby the Petitioners haue not halfe employment sufficient to worke as seruants; But the Petitioners are in worse case, then when the priuiledges were in strangers hands, which had no prentises. Besides the Masters of the Company haue raised the prizes of Bookes, Print in worse Paper, and with dimne and bad Letters.

The Stationers to whom these priuiledges were neuer intended by his Maesties most Gracious Gift, or the Grant of his Progenitors, are the chiefe Ingrossers of these Priuiledged Coppies, with some few Printers. And further, the Stationers by an agreement among themselves will retale no new Copies, vnlesse they be of their owne. For be it neuer so Religious, Learned, or profitable, if it be a Printers, either by purchase, or by free gift, they will not sell the same: but the Printer must loose his labour, his Paper and expence, if he will not sell them at their rate: by which meanes the Stationer hath all the profit both by Printing and Booke-selling.

If the Petitioners infringe any part of the former Decree, or any of their owne Ordinances, or but seeme to question their right in the benefits Graciously giuen them by his Maestie, or complaine of their vnconscionable and lawlesse proceedings, they by vertue of a Warrant Dormant, presently breake the Petitioners houses, imprison their bodies, seize their goods, and deface their Presses and Printing Instruments, without legall proceeding or euiction by information. And by this meanes dispose of all things amongst themselves, so a few are raised to great and infinite estates, and all the Petitioners thereby made absolute beggars.

*Reasons why the Petitioners should be relieved in this high and most Honourable Court.*

The Decree and their Ordinances barre them all reliefe in any Court of Iustice, or any other Court of Equity, but this onely.

The Decree and their Ordinances are absolutely contrary to the Lawes of this Kingdome, and against the Lawes of God and Nations.

The Masters haue in nothing performed their Contracts made at the obtaining the Decree.

The Petitioners are deprived of that freedome that all other loyall subiects inioy, and they ought to haue. His Maesties bounty extended to charitable vses, but is conuerted to their priuate ends and benefits.

*The Petitioners most humble request is:*

That the Decree may be dissolved.

That the Petitioners may inioy that liberty and priuiledge that euer honest and loyall subiect ought to inioy.

That they may haue equall share of what his Maestie Graciously gaue for their charitable vses.

And such other priuiledges distributed amongst the whole Company as of right belongs, wrongfully by them now vsurped.

The Petitioners shall beseech the Iudge of all Iudges, to Crowne you all with eternall Honour.

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